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ABSTRACT

This study is a follow-up of the work by Morris Rosenberg who found that younger-minority boys tend to have high self-esteem, but a relatively low achievement orientation and low grades in school. Sampling a total 898 high school senior boys, this study found that younger minority boys do have lower grades and lower occupational and educational aspirations. However, in contrast to Rosenberg's speculation that they receive more affection from their parents, it was found that younger-minority boys see their mothers, and to a small degree their fathers also, as less loving and more demanding than do other boys. The authors suggest that younger-minority boys may be less achievement oriented because of the particular combination of relationships they have with their parents, in contrast to Rosenberg's conclusion that the low achievement need by the younger-minority boy is the result by his unconditional acceptance and special affection he receives from his parents and older sisters. References and tables are included. (Author/SES)

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The "Younger-Minority Boy" as a Clue to the Source of Achievement Orientation*

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Empirical studies of birth order and sibling position have one predominating characteristic: Whenever either birth order (ordinal position), or sibling position is used as a research variable it is only used as an indicator of some other phenomenon (Kammeyer, 1967). In sociological and social-psychological studies birth order and sibling position are usually taken as indicators of some pattern of interaction that prevails (or is thought to prevail) between parents and their children in the different ordinal/sibling positions. Studies of ordinal and sibling position are for this reason best viewed as diagnostic or exploratory studies. They serve us best when they sensitize us to the importance of different interaction processes in the nuclear family.

The birth order/sibling position that we are considering in this report has had such a sensitizing character. We started by examining the effects of a particular ordinal/sibling position on the achievement orientations of high school boys, but this analysis led us on to a broader consideration of parent-child relations and their influence on the achievement orientations of our subjects. This will be clearer if we turn to a consideration of the specific ordinal/sibling position that stimulated the study.

The Younger-Minority Boy

Morris Rosenberg, (1965) in his monograph on the self-images of adolescents, described a position in the sibling structure of families that he called "the younger-minority boy." Rosenberg described younger-minority boys as boys whose older siblings are chiefly or exclusively girls. The feature that most typifies the younger-minority boy is that he is the first boy born into the family after several girls have been born. Rosenberg found the younger-minority boys interesting because they had higher self-esteem than other boys. This was even more interesting when he found that younger-minority

boys had relatively low grades in their school work, since high grades were generally associated with higher self-esteem. He speculated that the higher self-esteem of younger-minority boys might be a product of the "unconditional acceptance" that boys in this ordinal-sibling position had received from their parents (and older sisters). He assumed that a younger-minority boy would have parents who had long awaited the arrival of their first son, so when he arrived they would be likely to show him a special warmth and affection (Rosenberg, p. 114-116). Empirical evidence from the studies of Sears, Maccoby and Levin, (1957, p. 514) and some inferential evidence from Rosenberg's own data, tended to support the idea that the younger-minority boy was likely to be a loved and favored child.

The observation that, as a group, younger-minority boys tended to get lower grades than other boys is also of some strategic importance. On the basis of this information, plus some additional analysis, Rosenberg concluded: ". . .the younger minority boy, unlike other youngsters, tends to develop a type of self-esteem which is not based on competitive achievement, upon outdoing others, upon social and academic success." (Rosenberg, p. 125)

From this characterization we have deduced that the parent-child interaction that typifies the relationship between the younger-minority boy and his parents is one that leads to a relatively low "achievement orientation." This deduction generated the three questions that this paper will consider:

1. Does the younger minority boy display a lower than average level of achievement, and have lower than average aspirations?
2. Is the younger-minority boy different from other boys in his relations with his parents?

3. Finally, in the light of our understanding of the younger-minority boy, are there some general propositions that might be offered about the linkage between parent-child relations and achievement orientations?

Findings

The data of this study come from the questionnaire responses of a group of 898 boys who were high school seniors. Only thirty-five of the boys were younger-minority boys.

Our findings with regard to the high school grades of the younger-minority boys were similar to those of Rosenberg. Younger-minority boys tended to have somewhat lower grades than other boys. Forty percent of the younger-minority boys had mostly A's and B's, compared to forty-seven percent of the other boys.

We also examined several indicators of the boys' aspirations for achievement. When asked whether they planned to go to college, 66% of the "other boys" said they probably would go, compared to 43% of the younger-minority boys. A similar pattern was found for future occupational plans. Thirty-nine percent of the "other boys" planned to enter professional or high managerial occupations, while 20% of the younger-minority boys planned to do so. These data lend empirical support to the conclusion that younger-minority boys are somewhat less achievement oriented than other boys.

Rosenberg argued that this low achievement orientation was due to the "unconditional self-esteem" of younger-minority boys, which was produced by the generous amounts of parental love they had received. However, he had no direct measure of the assumed parental affection. In our study we had a scale of parent-child relations, as perceived by the child, so it was possible to get some measure of how the younger-minority boys felt their parents had treated them.

The parent-child relations scale was developed by Anne Roe and Marvin Siegelman (1963). It had the two bi-polar dimensions: 1. Loving - Rejecting; and 2. Casual - Demanding. These two dimensions are partially self-explanatory, but an item from each scale may better illustrate their content. A typical item from the loving-rejecting scale was: "My mother made me feel wanted and needed." An item from the casual-demanding scale was: "My mother pushed me to do well in everything I did." The same items were used for fathers. The subjects could respond: "Very true," "Tended to be true," "Tended to be untrue," or "Very untrue."

Our analysis did not confirm Rosenberg's assumption that younger-minority boys had more loving parents than other boys. As a group, younger-minority boys were somewhat less likely to perceive their mothers as loving than other boys thought their mothers were. With respect to their fathers, the younger-minority boys were much like the other boys, but they were slightly less likely to feel that their fathers were loving.

Rosenberg's discussion also implied that the fathers of younger-minority boys might place more demands on their sons, and this was borne out by our data. The younger-minority boys were more likely to see their fathers and the mothers as demanding than were other boys.

The matter of how demanding parents affect the achievement orientations of their sons has been noted in previous studies. At least two studies have found that the excessive dominance of fathers can have a detrimental effect upon the achievement orientations of their sons. The evidence suggests that if fathers are too demanding, too intrusive, too domineering, their sons will be less achievement oriented. (Bradburn, 1963; Rosen and D'Andrade, 1959)

So the younger-minority boy may be less achievement oriented, not because, as Rosenberg suggests, his mother and father gave him too much love

(leading to unconditional self-esteem), but because his parents were too demanding -- possibly because they were eager to see their first male heir succeed.

This leads to the final question of this study: What types of parents do have sons with the highest achievement orientation. We used the entire sample of boys to answer this question.

The parent-child relations scale produced two dichotomous measures for each parent:

Mother: Loving or Rejecting
Casual or Demanding

Father: Loving or Rejecting
Casual or Demanding

By using these four dichotomous classifications, sixteen possible parental combinations were produced. For example, a boy might have a mother who was loving and casual, while his father was rejecting and demanding. Or, of course, the characteristics of the parents might be completely reversed; or in any other possible combination. Our analysis sought to determine which combinations produced the greatest achievement orientation and which the least.

Achievement orientation was again measured in three ways:

1. Grades earned in high school
2. College aspirations
3. Occupational expectations.

In the attached Appendix, Tables 1, 2, and 3 show the data for each of the three achievement orientations and the sixteen combinations of parent-child relations. These tables reveal a fairly consistent pattern. There are some types of parent-child relations that consistently "produce" boys with high achievement orientations and others that "produce" boys with low

achievement orientations.

For example, among the boys whose parents -- both the mothers and the fathers -- were seen as loving and demanding, many had high achievement orientations. In our sample the boys who had this combination of parents had the highest percentage aspiring to go to college (78.8%), the highest percentage expecting to enter a high managerial or professional occupation (55.2%), and the second highest percentage with "A" or "B" grades (57.8%). At the other extreme there were the boys who saw their mothers as rejecting and casual, while their fathers were loving, but demanding. There were only sixteen boys in this category, but among them 50.0% had college aspirations, 33.3% had high occupational aspirations, and 18.8% had high grades. An interesting feature of the comparison between these two types is that the fathers were exactly the same type (loving and demanding) in both instances. This example shows that it may be the <u>particular combination</u> of parents that acts as a crucial factor in shaping the achievement orientation of a boy. This has been suggested in earlier studies, with the casual father and demanding mother having been singled out as one combination that produces a high achievement orientation. (Rosen and D'Andrade, p. 216)

Rather than continuing with a category by category analysis of the combinations of parental types and their relationships to achievement orientation, we will simply group the parental types according to whether they were associated with high, medium or low achievement orientations. These groupings are found in Table 4 of the Appendix. Table 4 is based on the details of Tables 1, 2 and 3. The types as they are listed go from the highest to the lowest achievement orientation.

Some Summary Observations

Some general statements about the relationships observed in Table 4 are possible, but there are also some perplexing anomolies. Concentrating only on the contrasts between the high and low achievement categories, it is clear that in general having a mother and father who are loving is an important factor associated with a high achievement orientation. However there is one category that is an exception. The second highest achievement orientation was found among boys who had loving and demanding mothers, while their fathers were rejecting and demanding.

On the converse side, rejecting parents generally were associated with boys who had low achievement orientations, but not invariably. The boys with the lowest achievement orientation had fathers who were loving and demanding, while their mothers were rejecting and casual. These varying relationships with the different combinations of parents suggest that there are important interactive effects on the achievement orientations of boys.

On the casual-demanding dimension our data tend to show some support for the previously made contention that mothers who are demanding will tend to have boys who are more achievement oriented than mothers who are casual. The three highest achievement oriented types had demanding mothers, while the three lowest achievement types had casual mothers. The casual mother in combination with the demanding father appears to be particularly effective in <u>reducing</u> the achievement orientation of a son (see the two lowest achievement orientation groups). Again these general statements must be tempered by noting that variations on the loving-rejecting dimension can change the effects of the casual and demanding characteristics of one or both parents.

Conclusion

We can now return to a consideration of the younger-minority boys in the light of the patterns found with the total sample of boys. We can ask if the lower achievement orientations of the younger-minority boys can be accounted for by the particular kinds of relationships they have with their parents. We might hypothesize that the younger-minority boys will have parents with characteristics that would lead less often to high achievement orientations. Table 5 shows that this is in fact the case. Younger-minority boys were somewhat less likely than other boys to have parents with the characteristics found to be associated with high achievement orientations (shown in table 4). While the difference is not great, it could account for the somewhat lower achievement orientations of the younger-minority boys.

When we went on to examine the relationship between parent-child relations and achievement orientations for only the younger-minority boys, we found that they generally showed the same relationships as the total sample of the boys. The younger-minority boys who had parents of the type generally associated with high and medium achievement orientations, did have higher grades and expected to go to college more often than the younger-minority boys who had parents of the type usually associated with low achievement orientations. However, occupational aspirations were not clearly related to parent-child relations among the younger-minority boys. The number of cases in this analysis was very small.

As a result of our analysis we would conclude that Rosenberg was wrong on two counts in his explanation of the lower than average achievement orientations of younger-minority boys. First, the younger-minority boys in our sample did not necessarily feel more loved than other boys. Indeed, on the average, they were somewhat more likely to feel rejected. Second, and of more general importance, Rosenberg's deduction that the boy with very high self-esteem

will have lower need to achieve is questionable. Coopersmith's studies of self-esteem have shown that boys with high self-esteem have higher aspirations than boys with low self-esteem. (Coopersmith, 1967, pp. 142-148) This was especially true for what Coopersmith called the "socially espoused goals," e.g., occupation. Our research shows that boys who see their parents as most loving will often have the highest achievement aspirations. If being loved produces high self-esteem, Rosenberg's interpretation is invalid, even for those younger-minority boys who feel loved by their parents. On the basis of our data it does not appear to us that there are good grounds for concluding that excessive parental love is going to be detrimental to the achievement orientation of sons. Instead, achievement orientation appears to be related to the various combinations of parental relations with their sons. The evidence from this, and similar previous research, is beginning to suggest at least the most important parental combinations that have an impact on the achievement orientations of boys.

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APPENDIX

Tables for

The "Younger-Minority Boy" as a Clue to the Source of Achievement Orientation

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Table 1. Percentage of Boys with "A" or "B" Grades by the Loving-Rejecting and Casual-Demanding Characteristics of Their Mothers and Fathers. (Rank order is shown in each cell with the highest achievement orientation ranked 1 and the lowest ranked 16.)

		Mother Loving	
		Mother Casual	Mother Demanding
Father Loving	Father Casual	52.9% N=104 RANK 4	47.4% N=38 RANK 6
	Father Demanding	44.4% N=54 RANK 7½	57.8% N=147 RANK 2

		Mother Rejecting	
		Mother Casual	Mother Demanding
Father Loving	Father Casual	50.0% N=18 RANK 5	38.9% N=18 RANK 13
	Father Demanding	18.8% N=16 RANK 16	44.4% N=36 RANK 7½

		Mother Loving	
		Mother Casual	Mother Demanding
Father Rejecting	Father Casual	54.5% N=33 RANK 3	41.7% N=12 RANK 10
	Father Demanding	29.0% N=38 RANK 15	60.8% N=74 RANK 1

		Mother Rejecting	
		Mother Casual	Mother Demanding
Father Rejecting	Father Casual	34.8% N=46 RANK 14	42.1% N=38 RANK 9
	Father Demanding	40.5% N=42 RANK 12	40.7% N=135 RANK 11

Table 3. Percentage of Boys with Aspirations for High Managerial or Professional Occupations by the Loving-Rejecting and Casual-Demanding Characteristics of Their Mothers and Fathers. (Rank order is shown in each cell with the highest achievement orientation ranked 1 and the lowest ranked 16.)

		Mother Loving	
		Mother Casual	Mother Demanding
Father Loving	Father Casual	46.3% N=95 RANK 5	51.6% N=31 RANK 2
	Father Demanding	42.0% N=50 RANK 12	55.2% N=134 RANK 1

		Mother Rejecting	
		Mother Casual	Mother Demanding
Father Loving	Father Casual	46.7% N=15 RANK 4	43.8% N=16 RANK 8
	Father Demanding	33.3% N=12 RANK 16	40.0% N=30 RANK 13

		Mother Loving	
		Mother Casual	Mother Demanding
Father Rejecting	Father Casual	42.3% N=26 RANK 11	45.4% N=11 RANK 7
	Father Demanding	34.3% N=34 RANK 15	47.1% N=68 RANK 3

		Mother Rejecting	
		Mother Casual	Mother Demanding
Father Rejecting	Father Casual	43.6% N=39 RANK 9	42.4% N=33 RANK 10
	Father Demanding	46.0% N=37 RANK 6	38.6% N=114 RANK 14

Table 2. Percentage of Boys with Aspirations for Attending College by the Loving-Rejecting and Casual Demanding Characteristics of Their Mothers and Fathers. (Rank order is shown in each cell with the highest achievement orientation ranked 1 and the lowest 16.)

		Mother Loving: Mother Casual	Mother Loving: Mother Demanding
Father Loving	Father Casual	63.8% N=105 RANK 8	71.0% N=38 RANK 5
	Father Demanding	75.9% N=54 RANK 2	78.8% N=146 RANK 1

		Mother Rejecting: Mother Casual	Mother Rejecting: Mother Demanding
Father Loving	Father Casual	61.1% N=18 RANK 9	66.7% N=18 RANK 6½
	Father Demanding	50.0% N=16 RANK 15½	66.7% N=36 RANK 6½

		Mother Loving: Mother Casual	Mother Loving: Mother Demanding
Father Rejecting	Father Casual	51.5% N=33 RANK 14	50.0% N=12 RANK 15½
	Father Demanding	55.3% N=38 RANK 13	73.0% N=74 RANK 3

		Mother Rejecting: Mother Casual	Mother Rejecting: Mother Demanding
Father Rejecting	Father Casual	58.7% N=46 RANK 11	57.9% N=38 RANK 12
	Father Demanding	71.4% N=42 RANK 4	59.3% N=135 RANK 10

Table 4. Parental Charateristics Associated with High, Medium and Low Achievement Orientations of High School Boys.

Boys with High Achievement Orientations had:

1. Mothers Loving and Demanding - Fathers Loving and Demanding
2. Mothers Loving and Demanding - Fathers Rejecting and Demanding
3. Mothers Loving and Demanding - Fathers Loving and Casual
4. Mothers Loving and Casual - Fathers Loving and Casual
5. Mothers Loving and Casual - Fathers Loving and Demanding

Boys with Medium Achievement Orientations had:

6. Mothers Rejecting and Casual - Fathers Loving and Casual
7. Mothers Rejecting and Casual - Fathers Rejecting and Demanding
8. Mothers Rejecting and Demanding - Fathers Loving and Demanding
9. Mothers Rejecting and Demanding - Fathers Loving and Casual
10. Mothers Loving and Casual - Fathers Rejecting and Casual
11. Mothers Rejecting and Demanding - Fathers Rejecting and Casual

Boys with Low Achievement Orientations had:

12. Mothers Rejecting and Demanding - Fathers Rejecting and Demanding
13. Mothers Loving and Demanding - Fathers Rejecting and Casual
14. Mothers Rejecting and Casual - Fathers Rejecting and Casual
15. Mothers Loving and Casual - Fathers Rejecting and Demanding
16. Mothers Rejecting and Casual - Fathers Loving and Demanding

Table 5. A Comparison of the Parental Charateristics of Younger-Minority Boys and All Other Boys.

Parental Characteristics Associated With:	Younger-Minority Boys	All-Other Boys
High Achievement	40.0% N=12	49.5% N=405
Medium Achievement	23.3% N=7	21.7% N=178
Low Achievement	36.7% N=11	28.8% N=236